

HOMEFRONT

THE ART AND DESIGN OF LIVING WELL | Shell Art, Teapots



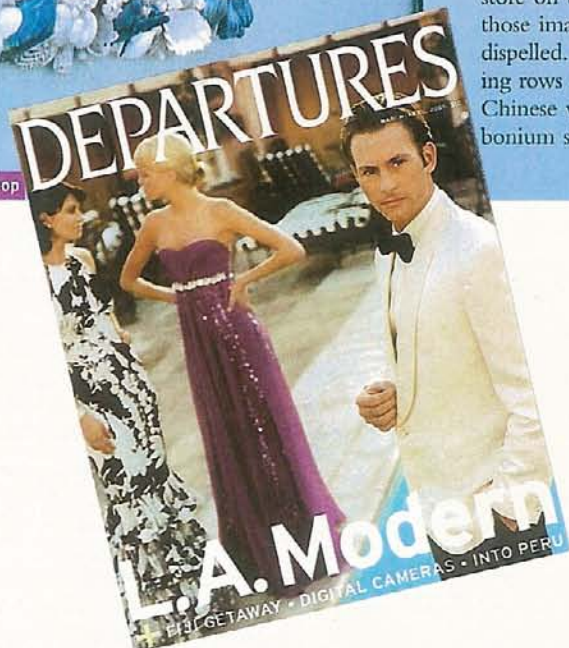
Shell Shocked

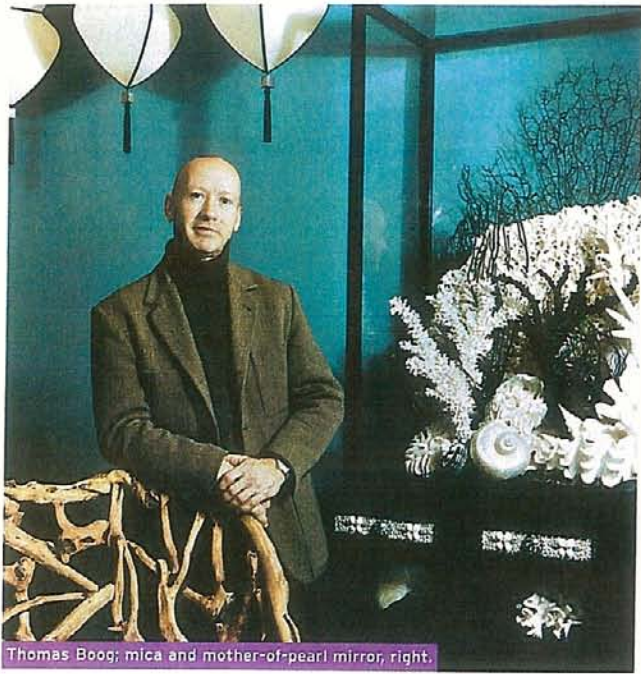
Thomas Boog tames nature, redefining seashell art with a bold elegance.

By Elisabeth Franck

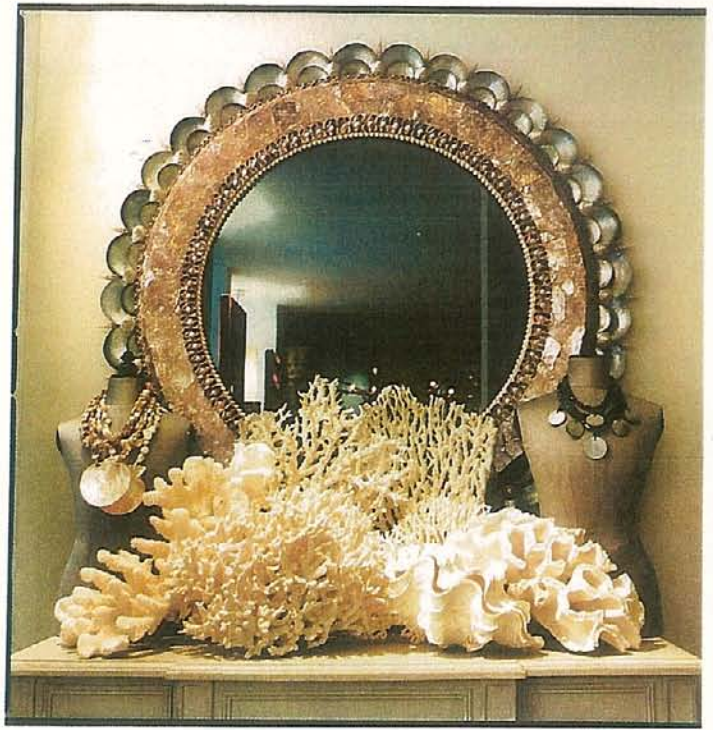
CLEAN LINES, delicate compositions, contemporary edge—you rarely hear such phrases describing objects embellished with seashells. But walk into Swiss designer Thomas Boog's store on the central Rue de Bourgogne in Paris and all those images of fifties kitsch and retro beach houses are dispelled. Austere metallic screens adorned with gleaming rows of mother-of-pearl discs; an eight-foot-tall Chinese vase inlaid with thousands of small brown umbonium shells that form a pattern resembling sharkskin;

Inside Boog's Parisian shop





Thomas Boog; mica and mother-of-pearl mirror, right.



lacy black sea fans that have been shaped into dramatic candleholders; handmade camphor-root furniture and sleek silk lanterns. These rare and spectacular creations are all by Boog.

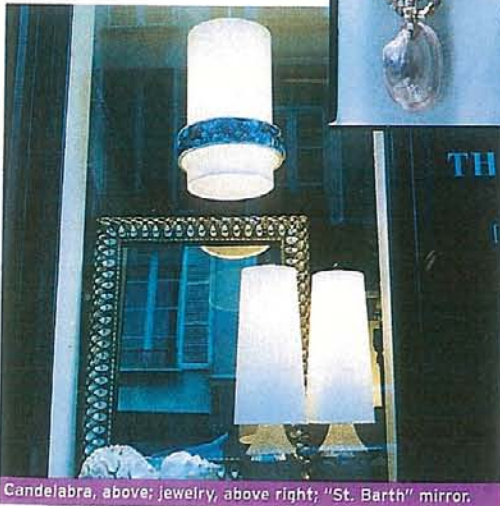
A former artistic director at Charles Jourdan and design manager for Bally, Boog jokes that he never set out to rehabilitate seashells. He simply chose to work with them as a personal challenge of sorts. "I thought to myself, There is no reason why seashells cannot be used to make beautiful objects," he explains. "They are usually just very mishandled, but they can be very modern, too."

Taking his primary inspiration from Chinese aesthetics—in particular, traditional mother-of-pearl art—with Italian Renaissance art and interior design a key influence, Boog has developed a singular style. His designs may verge on the baroque, but he keeps them classic and tasteful by mixing in contemporary shapes and ornate detailing. He has even applied his craft to yachts in Greece, beach houses

on Mustique, and restaurants in Hong Kong.

Despite its dowdy reputation, seashell design has not always been the province of do-it-yourselfers. In 18th-century France, furniture makers turned out colorful and elaborate works that incorporated shells. "People are less daring than they were," Boog says. "Back then you could find grottos decorated with shells in the middle of the Norman countryside."

Though his shop has many ready-made items—chandeliers, coral necklaces, Chinese lanterns, ornamented picture frames—the bulk of Boog's work is made to order. His most extraordinary commissions include a seashell grotto he is building in Jacksonville, Florida, and a swimming pool in Morocco for which



Candelabra, above; jewelry, above right; "St. Barth" mirror.

OMEFRONT



Seashell-adorned wonders fill the Rue de Bourgogne boutique.

he designed 12 shell-covered pillars and arches linking the veranda with the main house. Boog custom-designs smaller pieces as well, such as a CD chest inlaid with mother-of-pearl and a mirror bordered in a shell and coral pattern. He begins each production with a watercolor for the client. Then, choosing from his impressive collection (featuring everything from black French razor clams and tiny white Indian umboniums to rare vintage blue coral), he attaches each shell by hand.

On these fragile pieces, even the elements that remain largely unseen—a lamp base, for example—are carefully decorated with minute shells before the bigger ones are added. “Which can be very disappointing when they end up glued to the tables of a yacht,” Boog says with a laugh.

Necklaces start at \$340; custom-made mirrors are from \$4,000.
Thomas Boog, 52 Rue de Bourgogne, Seventh Arrondissement, Paris;
33-1/43-17-30-03; www.thomasboog.com.